University takes Centre Stage in China

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The University of Birmingham is to support Birmingham Royal Ballet (BRB) as they embark on a major tour of China next month, in order to raise the profile of the City to new audiences.

The University is one of the supporting sponsors of the BRB tour, which will take place in January 2009 across three major cities in China. Performances and events will be staged in Guangzhou (a sister city of Birmingham), Beijing and Shanghai.

The tour is the latest development in a longstanding partnership between the University and BRB, who have delivered a Master's Degree in Dance for more than a decade. A number of graduates from the course – including Chinese principal dancer Lei Zhao - will perform in BRB's touring productions of Beauty and the Beast and Romeo and Juliet. The Royal Ballet Sinfonia, the Orchestra of the Birmingham Royal Ballet, will also delight audiences with concerts in Beijing and Shanghai.

The team will be joined by representatives from the University. Not only will the tour promote the wealth of arts, businesses, education and research in Birmingham to an audience in China, but it will build on the relationships that already exist in Asia.

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, Professor Michael Sterling, explained:

"The University of Birmingham welcomed the opportunity to join forces with another cultural beacon of the city which enjoys a high international profile by sponsoring the BRB tour to China. The University's international strategy recognises the importance of building our presence in China to support the development of key partnerships for education and research.

We also have many loyal University alumni resident in the three cities of the BRB tour, who act as our ambassadors having returned to China following their study in Birmingham."

The Applied Studies in Dance postgraduate programme in the University's School of Education attracts dancers from across the globe. It aims to utilise and extend the knowledge, skills and understanding of professional dancers beyond the context of professional theatre, with a particular emphasis on dance in education and the community.

Professor Sterling said: "We are particularly proud of our long-standing association with BRB; many of the dancers on the tour are in fact graduates of our postgraduate course in Applied Studies in Dance. This tailor-made master's programme in dance in education enables dancers to study for a postgraduate qualification alongside their role as a member of the ballet company. The links and opportunities of working together are great and the China tour seemed the perfect vehicle to promote this activity."

Ends

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Notes to Editor:

The University of Birmingham A world ranking university

- 23% of staff working at the University are international and come from 150 countries
- Almost 800 Chinese students currently study at Birmingham
- Currently ranked 5th in the UK for the quality of our research
- One of only 11 UK higher education institutions in the top 100 universities in the Jiao Tong worldwide league table
- There are five Nobel Prize winners amongst University alumni and academic staff, including former student Sir Paul Nurse, who is now head of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund.
- 96% of Birmingham graduates are either employed, engaged in further study, or travelling within six months of leaving the University

Lei Zhao MA, Applied Studies in Dance Programme Graduate

Born in Shanghai, Lei trained at the Shanghai Dance School and then at Northern Ballet School. She joined Birmingham Royal Ballet in 1995; First Artist, 2001; Soloist, 2003. Lei was awarded First Prize at the China Ballet Competition and a bronze medal at the Helsinki International Ballet Competition. Lei has also choreographed for one of the Company's choreographic projects, The Planets.

She said: "The degree course definitely opened my perspectives about dance. It helped me to view the dance world not only from a dancer's point of view. It also gave me a general idea of what areas I am most interested in and would like to return to in future career decisions."

For further details on the Applied Studies in Dance Programme please contact: Tansin Benn - tel: 0121 415 8391 email: t.c.benn@bham.ac.uk or visit **www.bham.ac.uk (http://www.bham.ac.uk/)**

Birmingham Royal Ballet

Birmingham Royal Ballet's international touring continues to China in January 2009 with performances of two full-length narrative ballets; Company Director David Bintley's Beauty and the Beast and Kenneth MacMillan's Romeo and Juliet. Designs are by Paul Andrews. The Royal Ballet Sinfonia, the Orchestra of the Birmingham Royal Ballet, will also delight audiences with concerts in Beijing and Shanghai.

Birmingham Royal Ballet is pleased to announce the 2009 tour is sponsored by Amway Artistry, Birmingham City Council, IMI, The University of Birmingham, Bournville College, The Heart of England (Advantage West Midlands) and the British Council.

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